

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

APRIL 1, 1880.—Ordered to be printed.

MR. BAYARD, from the Committee on Finance, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. 1090.]

*The Finance Committee, to whom was referred the bill (S. 1090) for the relief of John D. Defrees, Public Printer, having had the same under consideration, submit the following report :*

Mr. John D. Defrees is the Public Printer, and under provisions of the act of July 31, 1876 (Stats. at Large, vol. 19, page 105), has given bond in the sum of \$100,000 "for the faithful performance of the duties of his office."

Among his duties is included that of paying the employés of the Government Printing Office; and sums averaging \$90,000 a month in this way pass through his hands.

Since 1861, when the Government Printing Office was established, Mr. John Larcombe has been the pay clerk, and to his hands these large sums of money have been solely intrusted, and no inaccuracy or default has in this long term of service been imputed to him.

He has gained and still retains the entire confidence of all who know him.

On the second day of January, 1879, certain envelopes, containing \$9,813, were abstracted from the fire-proof safe in the Government Printing Office, and the circumstances are detailed in the subjoined statements of Mr. Defrees and Mr. Larcombe.

Both of these gentlemen were before your committee and responded to a long and careful inquiry and examination.

The result of the deliberations of your committee is, that the loss of the money in question was caused by an adroitly planned burglary committed by professional safe-burglars.

Your committee concur in exonerating Mr. Defrees and his employés from any contributory negligence or default in respect of this loss, and consider that they each and all performed their duties under the law faithfully and honestly, so that the loss is justly to be borne by the United States Government, to whom the stolen money belonged.

They therefore report the bill back and recommend that it be passed.

OFFICE OF PUBLIC PRINTER,  
Washington, March 18, 1880.

SIR: I have the honor of acknowledging the receipt of your letter of yesterday, asking me to furnish a detailed statement in relation to the robbery of the safe at the Government Printing Office, which I proceed to do.

In the purchase of Mr. Wendell's printing establishment (in 1861), a large safe, then considered the best made, became the property of the government. It has been in the office ever since; though since the robbery I purchased a safe with all the modern improvements, in which only small amounts of money are now kept.

## 2 MONEY STOLEN FROM GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.

Mr. John Larcombe was Mr. Wendell's paying clerk, and is and has been the paying clerk of the Government Printing Office from its establishment. He was born and raised in this city, and is known to many of the prominent bankers and others as a most painstaking and careful business man.

His method of transacting the business of the office was to get the money from the Treasury to pay off employes on the day previous to that on which it was to be paid, to assort it, and to place in an envelope the amount earned by each individual, so as to facilitate its payment on the signing of the pay-roll. These envelopes were then put into the safe.

On the second day of January, 1879, having paid off the employes of the document room, he proceeded to the bindery to pay off those employed there, leaving the envelopes containing money for the employes of the folding room in the safe, which was locked by him and the key put into his pocket. This fact is not only established by his own testimony, but by two employes who always assisted him in making payment. While in the bindery room, between eleven and one o'clock, the safe was entered by means of a false key, and the envelopes containing the \$9,813 intended for the payment of the employes of the folding room were taken.

Detectives were immediately employed to find out and arrest the robbers if possible. It was soon ascertained that the robbery had been committed by three notorious professional safe-burglars of New York, one of whom is now in the New York penitentiary for another offense. One of the others afterwards robbed a bank in Charleston, S. C., was apprehended and escaped from the jail.

These robbers are well known to the New York detectives, and we still hope to bring two of them to trial on the indictment found in the criminal court of this city.

The Public Printer being the disbursing officer, and who has given a bond for \$100,000, is responsible for all losses, and, therefore, no bond is required of Mr. Larcombe, who is a clerk receiving \$1,800 per year.

I believe I have fully answered the inquiries made in your letter, and given you all the information within my knowledge in relation to the robbery.

Very respectfully, yours, &c.,

JNO. D. DEFREES,  
*Public Printer.*

Hon. T. F. BAYARD,  
*Chairman of the Committee on Finance.*

On the 31st December, 1878, at about 10.40 a. m., I brought to the Government Printing Office, from the Treasury, \$64,213.78, with which to begin, on the second of January, the payment of the employes therein. I began at once the work of putting the money in the envelopes (each person's money, except the small change, being put in an envelope), which occupied me until after 4 p. m., when, after putting all the money away in the safe, I left the office for the day. I was at my desk on the morning of the first of January from 9 to 12 o'clock. The office was closed on that day. Next morning (January 2, 1879), by 9 o'clock, I was at work paying the principal composing room, which occupied me until 11 o'clock. From there I returned to my room for the purpose of getting the money with which to pay the employes in the bindery, and to put away some eight to ten envelopes containing the money of absentees on the first floor paid. Having now the money for that purpose, I went into the bindery to pay the employes there, and remained there until just before 1 o'clock (the beginning of the dinner hour), when I returned to my room with the money not then paid out and put it back into the safe. When I left my room (at a little after 11 o'clock) to go to the bindery there was about ten thousand dollars in the safe, including small change, all except the change being contained in envelopes, and nearly all of it intended for the payment of employes in the folding room. Just after one o'clock Mr. W. H. Norton (an employe) came to me to get a sheet of the pay-roll and the money with which to wait upon and pay an absent sick compositor. When I opened the safe to get out the money for this purpose, I then discovered the safe had been robbed; every envelope containing money (except two) and over six hundred empty ones had been carried off while I was in the bindery. Undoubtedly it had been opened with a false key. It was locked, and the key in my possession, during my absence from the room. The robbers had carried off \$9,813. Detective officers were sent for instantly, two of whom arrived within a half hour. They went to work immediately and earnestly, and not many days had elapsed before they ascertained who the robbers were. They are known to detectives here and elsewhere to be the most expert sneak thieves in the country. Three of them have been indicted by the grand jury of this District for this robbery.

JOHN LARCOMBE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., March 30, 1880.